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See Woodrow's MS
1657. 14. fol. p. 303.

A
DECLARATION
OF THE
BRETHREN,

who are for the established
GOVERNMENT and JUDICATORIES
OF THIS

CHURCH,

Expressing their earnest desires of
UNION and PEACE with their
DISENTING BRETHREN.

*Printed at the Press of the Protestant
Religious Society in the Year 1657. entitled
Protestants no Subscribers to Presbytery no Prelates*

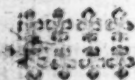
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Printed and Sold by
J. D. S.

**A DECLARATION OF THE BRETHREN, who
are for the established Government and
Judicatories of this Church, expressing
their earnest desires of Union and Peace,
with their Dissenting Brethren.**

It may justly seem strange, to all impartial Observers, that we cannot but be looked on by all the lovers of Liberty, as a sad and humbling dispensation; That after so many years tossing about a debate now so far removed out of our way, and after so many endeavours for an accommodation, We should yet be not desirous to expresse our sad resentment of the continuance of our dissent, and of the afflicted condition of this National Church. For our part, we have been from the beginning, and yet are, so sensible of the evil and prejudice of these Divisions, that as we have made Conscience of laying them before the Lord, and afflict our souls because of them, and for the sin provoking the same; So we have not forborn, from time to time, to seek peace and pursue it upon any terms that might be consistent with the simple freedom of our own judgements in the matters controverted, and with the being of Presbyterian government, which we believe to be of God; and which the Lord is mercifully but established among us in answer to the prayers of many, of whom some now sleep in the Lord, and by the no small sufferings and troubles of the present generation. We are not to insensible, as men, how we have suffered many sad changes in our opposing our Brethren irregular, confused, destructive to the Government; nor, as Christians and Ministers of the Gospel, how God might justly plague any private interest for the sake of unity, which should add strength to that fire, and how our united work might be retarded, and

obstructed by these contentions, That we should take any pleasure in them; if so be we could obtain peace upon safe and just terms. In pursuance whereof, both in our conferences with our Brethren at home, and of late in *England*, and in our Representation published to the world, we have expressed our earnest desires for peace; and our ready condescendence to gain them to an Union in the Lord for carrying on the work of God amongst us; though as yet without any desired success: but while we have been seeking peace, some of them have been sailing all winds to compass their own ends and set up a domination of their Party in this Church.

We are sorry we have so much cause to complain of our Brethren; that they should not only have begun a needlesse rent in this Church upon a Question so extrinsick to our Doctrine, Worship, and Government; But that since they have so notably injured us in our Person and Ministry, by casting so many and so foul reproaches upon us, both by word and write at home and abroad, that so they might make us hatefull, and purchase credite and power to their own Party; whereby also they have endeavoured to render this Nationall Church odious in the view of the world; and exposed her to be a laughing-stock to all her enemies on all hands; and furnished them with weapons (if their stout standers deserved to have credite) whereby to fight against her, and justifie their opposition to her; when her own Children bear such witness against her. Though we heartily wish our Brethren may seriously consider and lay to heart those their sayings; Yet, for our part, we profess it is not our purpose to impose upon their Judgements in those matters of our differences; nor do we keep at a distance from them upon the account of any such personal injuries; having learned from our Master to forgive; and patiently to bear; hoping that as these aspersions are not believed by these who know us; (so in due time He will wipe them off the conviction of all who do not wilfully blind their own eyes; but our stumbling as our Brethren, is chiefly upon the account of the wrongs they have done; and daily do to the said Government of this Church; from which, if they would once cease, and provide against them for the future, our debates with them were no longer necessary. As our hopes of peace after our first rupture were soon blasted; when we perceived our Brethren not sitting at the same table of their rent; but

Starting

Raising new quarrels to increase alienations ; So we did easily foresee
 that their way did manifestly tend to the overturning of the established
 Church-government ; and that, if they did not hearken unto peace,
 there was no remedy but they behoved to run some course destructive
 thereunto. We could in prudence judge no otherwise, when in the very
 entry we found them decline the Authority of the Supreme Church-
 Judicatory in this Nation once and again, and ready to do so from time
 to time at their pleasure ; and drawing Factions and Parties with them
 in that opposition ; and branding Church-officers and inferiour Judica-
 tories, as generally corrupt ; that so all of them might be cast loose, or,
 at least, moulded to their mind. But they did not long leave us to our
 own conjectures and fears in this matter ; having soon after, and con-
 stantly to this day, by their irregular practices contrary to all order (upon
 the account of their Declinatour, and the pretended corruption of this
 Church, both Officers and Members which they could never make out,
 though often put to it) bewrayed their small respect to the established
 Government ; planting Congregations in a tumultuous and disorderly
 way, without respect either to the Church Judicatories, or to the just
 interest of the People of the Congregation ; and counter-acting to the
 Resolutions and Determinations of Judicatories, when any of them
 pleased to be dissatisfied therewith ; with many the like practices which
 we take no pleasure to repeat. And we found yet more cause to judge
 that these were not the deeds only of some few amongst them, more
 forward and violent than the rest, but agreeable to the principles of all,
 at least of their prime Leaders, when our conference for Union with
 them, in November, 1655, was broken-up chiefly upon this account
 (beside some other things mentioned in our Representation) That we
 could not denude the Church-Judicatories of their just Power, and
 devolve matters into the hands of an extra-judiciall Committee of
 equal numbers, and that they expressly refused subordination and sub-
 mission to the Church Judicatories to which they and we were solemnly
 engaged at our Admission to the Ministry, and which we were willing
 to renew for our part, and without which our established Judicatories
 shall be nothing else but so many consultative meetings : A principle in-
 consistent with Presbyteriall-government in a constituted Church, as all
 who are acquainted with debates of that nature will easily perceive.
 The prejudices to the Church-government flowing from their way,

did

did not sit here; we were but too much further confirmed in our just grounds of fear, while some of them did endeavour to encroach the power of Church-judicatories by procuring an Order putting the power of giving Testimonie to Infrants (which is due to Presbyteries only, who are authorized to judge of their Call, and to try and ordain them) in the hands of some select persons of their own choosing. And when it pleased the Lord to break that snare, their leading men have again of late attempted the utter ruine of this Church and of those who differ from them: Under the pretext of seeking a commission for plantation of Churches, they projected to have the power of disposing the legal maintenance of Ministers put in the hands of their Commission; though they know such a power was never given nor assumed by such a Judicatory, but that it is contrary to the order established by the Law of the Land; the great design thereof being not only to call the Authority of the late Assemblies in question as they expresse in their desire; but to have the maintenance put in the hands of men to their mind who were the proposers of the Overture; that so they might discourage all who are opposite to them from the Ministrie: But not contenting themselves with this, they have further proposed and projected to have it imposed upon us, That there should be a particular Visitation appointed in every Synod, consisting of equal numbers of both Judicatories, the one half to be chosen by the one party, and the other by the other party respectively, with power given them from the Synods for purging and planting Ministers and Elders; and composing present and future Divisions in Presbyteries and Congregations: Whose the balance of the Synod. And that there should be also a general Committee of Deputies from the several Synods, of equal numbers, chosen as is aforesaid, and authorized by Synods, without whose previous advice and consent the respective Synods may not reverse anything done by the aforesaid Visitators; and such Visitation and Commission to editions only till all your differences be healed; and in the Lord's providence ministers some better way for settling peace among us; or willing A two it be so.

These projects we look upon as tending up in effect a new Ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and a plant which is not of Gods' planting, and not only suspending the established Church-government, but also actually subverting it to make way for the projected their dominion in the Church and over their Brethren. For, this course projected by them, doth

doth clearly take away the power of Synods and Presbyteries; not only in the matter of our present differences, and in the matter of purg-
 ing and planting Ministers and Elders (wherein the chief exercise of their
 power consisteth) but in all future divisions: And what may not men
 affecting preeminence make a matter of difference that they may con-
 tinue themselves in power? It laicth also for a foundation, an univer-
 sal imputation upon the Synods and other Church-judicatories as not
 worthy to be trusted with the Work committed to them by Christ; and
 that they will not be so faithful in the Work of Reformation, nor in
 composing any difference which may arise hereafter of what importance
 so ever, as these Delegates chosen after a new-mould. So that a pre-
 parative is led to lay aside Synods and Presbyteries when any party
 pleaseth to quarrel them, and they must lend their power to give some
 shadow of Authority to any Party who pleaseth to tread upon them.
 It is a tyrannical imposition upon Synods, that they must give their
 power to persons whom they have not liberty to choose, nor power to
 call them to an account; and must set up a jurisdiction above them-
 selves with, at least, a Negative voice to frustrate all their actings, if
 these Delegates please: Yea, not only is a Negative voice required to
 be given them in or over all the Judicatories of this Church; (which by
 parity of reason cannot be denied to any Party that pleaseth to make a
 rent, if so be it be given to our Brethren, who are so few in number in
 comparison of the body of the Ministerie of this Church, and very few
 or none at all of them being in some Synods.) But hereby also a way is
 laid for perpetuating differences and contentions, by yoking Parties of
 equal numbers together in debate, who probably will not cede to other,
 and so in stead of composing, the breach shall be widened. Nor do we
 see here any desire or purpose to put an end to this arbitrary juris-
 diction, but for any thing we know, it might be perpetual, and the Synods
 never return to their due liberty if those proposals once took place: for
 not only were it in their power to continue present differences so long as
 they please, and consequently to continue that extra-judicial power to
 compose them, much more if they must be continued for composing any
 future divisions they shall be pleased to start. But if in process of time
 this way shall not please them, they (in stead of recurring to Christs
 own institutions) do give us an hint of some better way, which they
 expect may be ministered for settling peace.

As we are confident that (upon these and many other weighty considerations) all who cordially own the Church-government as of divine right, will be ashamed of such encroachments. So we heartily wish those who have had hand in them, may lay to heart their carriage toward their Mother-church, whose interests they are bound by the oath of God to maintain. And though we doubt nothing of their unwearied endeavours (if they persist in their former temper) yet again to set on foot and prosecute those their purposes, and that they may pretend to prosecute them as the only expedient to draw us to Union; which is in effect to cast all Christs interests among us under their feet, and to force us to what terms of Union they please, when they shall have us in their power: Yet, for our part, we resolve, in the power of the Lords Grace, never to accord thereunto, nor recede from the established Government, be the hazard what it will. But what ever may be the Lords purpose to permit men to do to that Government, we will never buy peace at so dear a rate as the ruine thereof, nor be accessory thereunto by any deed of ours.

We have expressed our thoughts more fully in these things, without any purpose to defame or irritate our Brethren, or to charge these destructive courses upon all of them, but merely for our own vindication and justification in our adhering to our principles, in opposing these encroachments, and for our own exoneration before the world, and to our Brethren, if so be they will seriously ponder and weigh the tendency of these courses, and, being wearied of those unpleasing unprofitable and scandalous contentions, they will give proof of their love to peace and to the well-fare of their Mother-church and Christs precious interests in her, by thinking upon an agreement with us in the Lord. And albeit our Brethren may before this time fully know our mind in order thereunto, by our conference with them; and we have also given an account thereof to the world in our Representation. Yet we do once again hold our selves bound to declare our readiness to contribute to our utmost for advancing so good a work; and that, what ever wrongs we have sustained, yet we are heartily content to burie in oblivion all former injuries, and to be far from any animosities which might have flowed from the same; that so we and they may joyntly concur to uphold the established Church-government in the constitution thereof, and due subordination and submission thereunto, according to the lawfull known principles

principles wherein we have walked formerly, which both of us have professed to be of Divine right, and the preservation whereof we conceive they ought to prefer to any private interest whatsoever. And we believe it will afford them more peace in end so to do, than if they had obtained all their irregular desires which they have so industriously prosecuted. And albeit they differ from us in Judgement upon the matter of our first difference, yet we judge that needeth be no impediment to Union; seeing we have already offered and declared, that though we hold fast our own Judgement, yet we shall not impose upon their Judgements in that matter, it being now buried and taken out of our way: But we agree that the matter be remitted to the determination of a Generall Assembly, when the Lord shall grant the liberty thereof according to the established order, to whose determination we submit our selves. And we see not how our Brethren shall be able to justify themselves before the world, or in their own Consciences, if they continue a rent so prejudiciall, meerly because we cannot renounce our Judgements in such a debate, and say as they say.

Whereas it hath been often alleaged against us, as a mean of heightning Divisions, and an obstruction to Union; that by some Acts of the late Assemblies, a barre is laid in the way to keep men who are not of our Judgement from the Ministry, and to hold out men of their Judgement (though never so Godly) from being Members of Church-Judicatories. We shall not now insist to clear the justice and necessity of the conclusions of these Assemblies at that time, and to shew that nothing was then done, but what had been done formerly in like cases: We might also instruct that (though some very few Presbyteries have required of Intrants to the Ministry, of whatsoever Judgement, that they should promise not to trouble the peace of the Church with these needless debates, yet) to our best knowledge none of these Acts have been *de facto* a barr to hold out any Godly man, who was lawfully and orderly called and tried, though we may but too justly complain how industrious and active they have been to thrust in men of their Judgement, and to crush Godly and able men who did not agree with them. But to free our Brethren from all jealousies and grounds of suspicion, and to justify our selves before the world, as to our sincere and earnest desire of Union, we shall willingly agree that all these Acts be made void and null by the next General Assembly, to whom it belongeth to repeal Acts;

And that in the mean time they shall not be put in practice. And whereas they make so great a noise of the Censures inflicted on some of their number by the Assembly, 1653. Though we might say much on behalf of the Assembly their proceeding at that time; and of their lenitie who did Censure only four of their number, who yet have never submitted unto these Censures, and consequently have the lesse cause to complain: Yet to assure them that we are ready for peace, and do not minde nor desire the personall prejudice of any of them, but only the preservation of the order of this afflicted Church; we are content that the Synods (since a Generall Assembly doth not meet) do take off the Censures that are upon their respective Members; they giving assurance of their submission and subordination to the Judicatories, without which there can be no order nor Government, and which we have to this day constantly observed in our practice; and they also wish us until the times of our late differences.

And whereas our Brethren affirm, that their chief aim and scope in all their late actings, hath been to find out some effectuall way for purging out of scandalous and insufficient Ministers, and other Officers; We might too justly complain that this is but a Question started on the by, and since the time they had begun a rupture amongst us, And that they have so liberally aspersed the Ministry of this Church who differ from them, both at home and abroad, when yet upon exactest trials, both by them and us, nothing can be found answerable to the great cry raised against this Church and our Ministry. Yet in this businesse, we seriously declare we do not contravert with them, having professed our willingness to go about that work in the most strict way, according to justice and the common rules of Church Judicatories in such cases: And we have not only often interested them to unite upon this very account, that the work of purging might be carried on more effectually; but have upon all occasions of any report of scandal or insufficiency, laid forth our selves to the utmost to try and examine the truth thereof, and have not been wanting in inflicting due Censure for any thing that on any cime was found. Yea, so far are we from fore-slowing or obstructing, that to declare our readinesse and sincerity in that matter, we are content, if our Brethren be not satisfied with the rules of procedure hitherto agreed upon, that they condescend upon the strictest rules, can be desired in justice for trial and censure; and we shall be willing to observe

obey them, providing they be rules binding for all, and to which all will submit, both they and we.

Having thus again expressed our selves in this matter, we do seriously in the bowels of Jesus Christ, Exhort and Obtest all our Brethren, that as they do tender the Government of this Church, and the welfare of Christs Interests therein, they would lay aside prejudices and animosities, and cease from all irregular practices, and all things tending to hold up divisions and widen the breach: And that now at last, after so many experiences of the bitter fruits of contention, they will joye cordially to uphold the Lords Interests, and go on in His Work; that so the Gospel, and work of Reformation may prosper amongst us; the Lord may take delight to continue His habitation in the midst of us, and stumbling-blocks may be removed out of the way of the People, which have been multiplied by these differences. We have made choice of this way of making known our inclinations to peace, not upon any sinister design, but meerly that our heart in this matter may be made known to all our Brethren and the Lords People in the Land, and that our confessions may not be huddled up in a conference with some few, who may keep them up, or represent them to others as they please; but that all knowing our minds, there may be a foundation laid for begotting a good understanding, and making up an Union with all these whom the Lord shall convince of the necessity of peace in this poor Church, which we desire may be speedily gone about, considering the sad prejudices following upon this rupture, and the so long continuance thereof. And we cannot in reason but expect that our Brethren will hearken to our serious request, if so be they be real in their professions for Presbyterial-government, and do mind only the advancement of the work of God amongst us, and be not driving some other design all this while. But if after all these essayes and desires of Union, we be still, to our great grief, frustrated of our intentions, and men will continue an unnecessary Schism in the Church, Though we shall desire to reverence and stoupe to the Lords holy dispensation in it, and (as hitherto we have done) shall look upon that sad and humbling lot (more grievous to us than any thing could befall us in our particular concerns) as a call from Him exciting us to our work, that we may lay forth our selves in season and out of season, to make our Master Christ more known to His people, and bring-in Disciples to Him, and may make full proof of our Ministrie

in all the pains and oppositions thereof, that our Lord, who
certainly may find us so doing; Yet as to those who persist in such courses,
we must say that we have excused our selves, in discharge of our duty
towards them, and we hope it will appear to all unbiaſſed Men,
that, notwithstanding all their violent attempts against the Church
government and us, since our conference with them, yet we are not so
all irritated thereby to recede from the consecrations and oaths then
made. And as we do commit Christs Interests into His own hand, that
He may see to the preservation thereof, against those usurpations and
encroachments of men, and shall desire to lament after Him, till He be
pleased to dispell those clouds and shine upon this distressed Church;
So we invite all the Lords People in the Land that they will not give
place to Satans craft in these times who would take them off the main
work of Godlinesse and Religion, and engage them in fruitlesse con-
tentions and debates, whereof they will have neither profit nor pleasure to
end: But that with us they will lay to heart and lament all the evils
that have come and do daily grow upon us by these sad Divisions, and
that in their Stations they will adhere to the Interests of Christ, and
the settled Government of His Church, not suffering themselves to be
misled by the specious pretences of men while they run courses to destru-
ctive thereunto; As considering that it will be no grief of theirs to
appear in the latter end, when the Lord will judge, not according to
appearances or pretext, but righteous judgements, that they have had
no accession to the ruine of their Mother-Church, but have been a com-
fort to her in the day of her distress.

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